

**RIGHT: Vampire Barnabas Collins (Ben Cross) about to sink his teeth into a victim in *Dark Shadows***

# Cult classic of blood and horror

By DI STANLEY



**D**URING the 1960s, *Dark Shadows* was one of the most unusual shows on American day-time television.

While in format it was a soap, it had none of the froth or angst usually associated with the genre. Rather, it was a Gothic tale revolving around the residents of an isolated English manor house.

And instead of tears and personal dramas, it offered blood and horror — which cult fans lapped up.

Now, 20 years after *Dark Shadows* went off the air, the series has been reincarnated as a night-time series, starring British actor Ben (Chariots Of Fire) Cross as the elegant vampire Barnabas Collins, a 200-year-old bloodsucker

recently released from the family crypt.

(For the uninitiated, the show follows the cursed Collins clan, which not only includes the vampire, but a phoenix, at least one ghost and a wide range of other supernatural cousins.)

The series, which has everything associated with vampires — blood, bats and fangs — is directed by Dan Curtis, who made *War And Remembrance*.

Curtis, who produced the original series, really outdoes himself for the new show, creating a lovingly trashy production that steers the fine line between parody and pop-pycock.

Even Cross's vampire Barnabas has a sympathetic side, a miserable

being "trapped within this dark, monstrous shell, compelled by desires I cannot control to commit acts that sadden and repulse me".

Serving as the perfect setting for all these Gothic goings-on is dramatic Greystone Mansion in Beverly Hills. It was built in 1927 by oil baron Edward Doheny for his son Ned.

Fittingly, perhaps, the series is written by Matthew Hall, who grew up on the set of the original *Dark Shadows* — his mother, Grayson Hall, starred on the sixties show, and his father wrote many of the initial episodes.

"I had to go back and find out what the deal was — what strange hold the original show had on its

fans and players," Matthew said.

Strange... and powerful. The cult classic was and is so popular, that a legion of 50,000 fans still attend annual *Dark Shadows* festivals and subscribe to the monthly newsletter *ShadowGram* which chronicles the lives of the stars of the original show, crew members, writers, set and costume designers.

The series has also remained in constant syndication, and spawned two feature movies, 32 novels, one cookbook and two doctoral theses on the show's deeper meaning.

● The pilot of *Dark Shadows* screens on Channel Seven this Friday and Saturday at 8.30pm, before settling into a regular series.